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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000980

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SUBJECT: FORMER PM DZURINDA SAYS HZDS HAS NOWHERE TO GO

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Mikulas Dzurinda, former PM and leader of the opposition Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU), called the KDH a mess; questioned HZDS' suitability as a future partner; and said he has documents to prove the corruption of SNS leader Jan Slota during a December 19 luncheon with the Ambassador. End summary.

PARTY POLITICS

¶2. (C) Dzurinda believes PM Robert Fico has behaved quite cleverly. The recently adopted budget for 2007 left little for the Opposition to attack, since Fico by and large adopted Dzurinda's economic program. Slovakia will continue to have strong economic growth due to latent and continuing FDI and strong EU funds in the next few years.

¶3. (C) SDKU's former coalition partner, the opposition Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), is still a mess. Of the potential future leaders, Carnogursky doesn't know who he is or what he wants to be, Hrusovsky is weak, Palko is humorless, and Lipsic is too arrogant. None would be able to lead KDH from the woods. Dzurinda mused about the Mayor of Trnava, Stephan Bosnak, but thought he may not want the job. KDH hasn't decided whether their party Congress will be in spring or fall. Durkovsky (Bratislava) and Knapik (Kosice) won their Mayoral races not because of KDH's strength but because of SDKU's organization. (Comment. The two candidates ran as nominees of right-wing coalitions including both KDH and SDKU, but are most closely associated with KDH. End comment.)

¶4. (C) Dzurinda said the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) has become less palatable as a future coalition partner due to the recent behavior of its leader, former PM Vladimir Meciar. Former SDKU MinFinance Ivan Miklos recently commented to Dzurinda how increasingly difficult it would be for SDKU to cooperate with the HZDS Meciar is showing the public. (Comment. After June elections the only right-wing coalition that could hold a majority of seats in the Slovak Parliament would have had to include SDKU, KDH, the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) and HZDS. The main obstacle to this coalition was KDH's principled refusal to work with HZDS under Meciar. End comment.)

¶5. (C) Meciar will continue to play political games to bedevil Fico. Dzurinda believes Meciar only wants his immunity preserved and some recognition from the international community. (Comment. Ambassador replied that we would not give Meciar that, and that he was hardly making a better case for himself recently. End comment.) Dzurinda speculated that in a HZDS without Meciar MP Viliam Viteska would not make a good leader, but that MP Tibor Mikus is strong and not tainted by shady privatizations. Meciar can't leave the current coalition given KDH's continued divisions and refusal to work with HZDS in a coalition. If Meciar did

leave the coalition, Dzurinda would block any attempt by Fico to have early elections since Smer's popularity is currently so strong. Although early elections might deprive both KDH and HZDS the five percent threshold of votes required to get into the next Parliament, those losses would not necessarily be to the advantage of the other right-oriented opposition parties. (Comment. Early elections would require the consent of 90 of Slovakia's 150 MPs. The current ruling coalition holds 85 seats. End comment.)

¶16. (C) Dzurinda was surprised but not shocked by Slovak National Party (SNS) leader Jan Slota's loss in the Zilina mayoral race. SDKU candidate Ivan Harman brilliantly employed the get-out-the-vote forces of a unified NGO community, insuring not only mayoral success but success in the city parliament, where many of the newly elected members are from the NGO community.

SLOVAK INFORMATION SERVICE

¶17. (C) Dzurinda sent his personal emissary, Pavol Prokopovic, former Transport Minister and current head of the Parliamentary committee with jurisdiction over the Slovak Information Service (SIS), to warn SIS Director Magala about taking any HZDS people into the SIS. Dzurinda believes Magala is free from Russian influence and is honest, but that he is also immensely loyal to PM Fico. Dzurinda doubts Magala would take the political risk of spying on HZDS - as several high-ranking HZDS members have publicly alleged - or the opposition. Dzurinda did, however, suggest that any hint of illegal activities against political partners/opponents would bring the SIS in for a broad investigation.

CORRUPTION

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¶18. (C) Dzurinda claimed to "have in my hands information, written information, about specific corruption with Slota. We did not release it before the (mayoral) election because we did not want to be accused of negative campaigning. But the election is over."

¶19. (C) The Ambassador suggested that nobody has grabbed the anticorruption theme like KDH used to, and that SDKU should do so in the interest of good governance. Dzurinda said that Fico, while not personally corrupt, had a lot of corrupt people around him. Dzurinda claimed to have information that Kalinak and Pociatek had a secret meeting with Ivan Lexa Junior and Jozef Brhel, a former State Secretary at the Economy Ministry under Meciar and sponsor of SMER, to set up a company that would be involved in public tenders for computers going to the Finance and Interior Ministries. Juraj Siroky is now the owner of one of the few non-blacklisted construction firms, Vahostav, and would be getting all kinds of Transport ministry contracts.

¶110. (C) Dzurinda also noted that Smer's sponsors are restless, with a split between the Siroky wing and IntMin Robert Kalinak's group. "I have information that Kalinak and Fico no longer have coffee together. Did you notice that it was Caplovic and not Kalinak who filled in for PM questions in Fico's absence? I always used my most loyal minister, Miklos, for this event." (Comment. Fico and Kalinak seemed on good terms, even chummy, at last week's hockey game with the Ambassador. End comment.) Dzurinda noted that Fico relies almost exclusively on Madaric, Magala, and Glendova in making his decisions.

TRANSPETROL

¶111. (C) Ambassador noted that little progress is being made by the GOS on Transpetrol, and the Government seemed helpless. Dzurinda offered his assistance, but Ambassador observed it was best to keep the issue non-partisan, as we are still suggesting alternatives.

A NEW SDKU NOMINEE FOR PRESIDENT IN 2009?

¶12. (C) Dzurinda said he would have a heart to heart with former FM Eduard Kukan in the new year. Kukan's interest in public affairs seems to be fading and Dzurinda wants to make it seem like it is Kukan's idea not to run for President again in 2009. MP Iveta Radicova, SDKU,s most prominent rising star, has the fire in the belly for the job and could win according to Dzurinda . Ambassador recounted that when he suggested to Radicova that as mayor of Bratislava she would meet all the visiting Presidents, Radicova responded that she would prefer to meet them as an equal. "That's my Iveta," quipped Dzurinda.

DZURINDA,S HEALTH

¶13. (SBU) Dzurinda's leg, injured in a skiing accident last winter, is gradually getting better. He is now jogging for 50 minutes at a time, but is still in considerable pain. He will limit his skiing this year to cross-country. His goal is to run in the Boston Marathon in 2008.

VALLEE